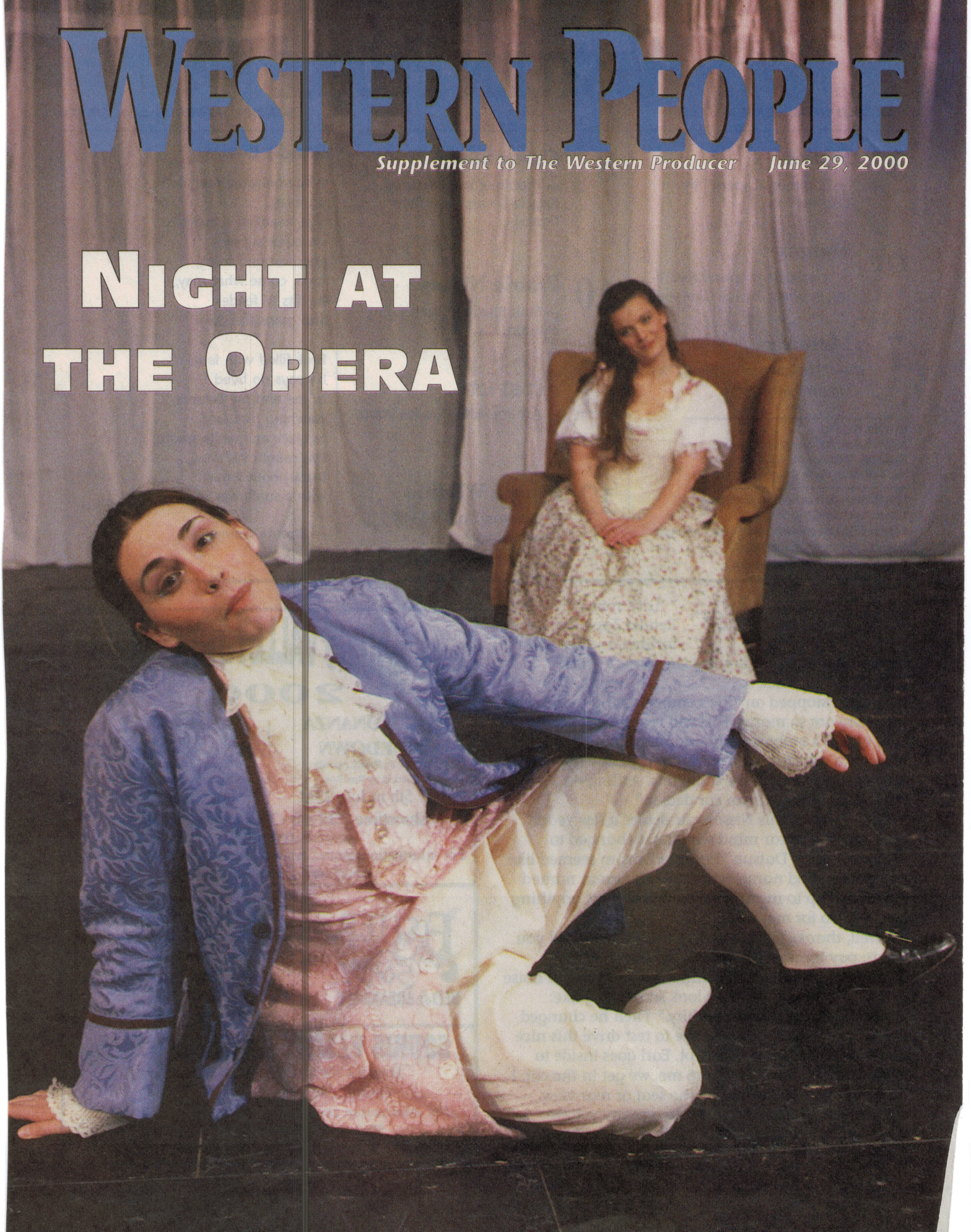
WESTERN PEOPLE
Supplement to The Western Producer June 29, 2000

NIGHT AT THE OPERA



WESTERN PEOPLE

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Angela Leson, left, and Karen Charlton. Photo by Grant Kernen, A.K. Photos, courtesy Saskatoon Opera Assoc. Story, page 8.

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome
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Bandit Bird

White-breasted nuthatch
on foray,
slips headfirst down tree
on quick survey;
peers around trunk,
then, come what may,
he flits to feeder
and grabs the prey.

Beak filled with loot,
he pays no heed
to me and my camera,
watching him feed.
In black and white photo,
I've caught his deed,
black-hooded thief
with a sunflower seed.

— **Donna Gamache**

Dear Reader

Let's spin the "Dear Reader Topic" wheel of fortune and see what comes up. Round and round she goes . . . click . . . click . . . . . .click . . . . . .clunk. The wheel has stopped on "life's embarrassing moments." But there are so many! This will require a separate spin of "life's embarrassing moments" sub-topic wheel. It's spinning and spinning and slowing down and slowing down some more and settling on . . . "that time at the Nissan car dealer."

Well, I was at this Nissan car dealer a few years ago, still of unclear mind why it got changed to "Nissan" from "Datsun" because Datsun seemed like a perfectly good name, when this salesman named Earl sidled up to me and asked if there was anything he could do for me.

"Well, thanks for asking," I said. "How would you like to pay for my kids' college education?"

Earl thought about this and responded with a noise which, if spelled out would look something like: "hnunghrum ssst sssssst bruhhy." Then he changed the subject to cars. Would I like to test drive this nice silver Maxima? Sure , why not. Earl goes inside to fetch the keys, hands them to me, we get in the car, I turn it on without adjusting the seat or rear-view mirrors, and quickly back it into a pretty yellow 240-ZX. There is a crunching sound. Well, that's my story. Hope you liked it.

Michael Gillgannon

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Country Capers

Fiction by Dianne Wey

To ease Erla's homecoming, Henry Joe cleans up the place. He fills the bathtub and shakes in powdered detergent. Then he adds the clothes and swishes them around with a broomstick. He hangs them outside on the line, then tackles the dishes by running them through the shower.

Henry Joe was spending his birthday alone. In 40 years of marriage, his wife had never been away this long. And who would have thought that his lottery ticket, the treat he'd bought because it wasn't every day a man turned 65, would be a winner?

Five thousand dollars! What Erla could have done with that! She'd been wanting new living room furniture and carpeting. Yes, in the moments when the sun was setting and the summer sky was all pinky-grey, and he was done milking and on his way up to the house, Henry Joe felt a pinch of regret at spending the lot of it in an impulsive and selfish way.

Erla has been gone nearly six weeks, since her mother fell and broke her hip. The old lady is 86 now, and still living in that trailer out on Lake Huron. For years, Erla has been trying to convince her mother to move into a retirement home, or out here to Saskatchewan with them. Henry Joe cringes at the thought of his mother-in-law occupying his rocker by the window, and Erla waiting on her hand and foot, with the old woman shouting and refusing to wear her hearing aids. But Erla insists it's the right thing to do. There's nobody else to look after Mom, not since her brother Frank died last year.

So Erla had flown off to Ontario, leaving Henry Joe to milk the herd, keep house and mind the chickens all by himself. It's a good thing it's summer, and he doesn't have a snowy lane to mess with, too.

Since boyhood, Henry Joe has been interested in cartooning. He'd once taken a beginner's course in Regina, back when his life was carefree. But his father died when he was 19 and so there was the farm to look after. Cows to milk, crops to plant and harvest. There was no time for hobbies.

Once Elgin had been born, there'd been no extra money, what with baby things to buy. Erla had spoiled the boy, Henry Joe thought. But he was just as guilty, handing over money left and right. Paying your own son to run the stable cleaner! When he was a boy everything was done by hand, and you worked for three square meals a day.

Then there was the bus, slumped out behind the barn now, its psychedelic sides spotted with rust. A reminder of Elgin's hippie days, when he'd taken off to Vancouver in his Jesus sandals to save the world. Peace, man.

Had life really gone that fast? Henry Joe can't remember when he last talked to the boy. He must be 38 by now. He's somewhere in the States, maybe California, Henry Joe isn't sure, although he suspects Erla knows. It's been contentious for them and they don't talk about it. That Henry Joe had refused to bail his only son out of jail.

Never mind that the marijuana was grown smack dab in the middle of his own corn crops. Never mind what the neighbors thought.

A couple of months ago, at the mall, Henry Joe and Erla had seen a cartoon display. Henry Joe had stopped to talk to the man. He was on the verge of buying a drawing of Betty Boop when Erla nudged him along. There were a million things more important than dumb cartoons.

So, last week when he'd collected his lottery winnings, in the sober knowledge of himself as a senior citizen, Henry Joe felt entitled to a little recklessness. He hired the man to paint cartoons on the side of the barn.

There was no time to do the job himself, though it would have been cheaper and he'd have enjoyed the challenge. Then too, the way his weight was creeping up, being up on a ladder all day might have been asking for trouble. What if his gout acted up? All in all, it was gratifying just to watch Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop take shape. Peter Rabbit. Popeye and Olive Oil and Brutus and Wimpy, too. More than a dozen in all.

On the phone he had not spoken a word of it to Erla, though the urge, the sheer excitement to tell someone, had been there. When she got home, he'd say he'd taken the work in trade. Somebody owed him for bales and couldn't pay. They'd sent their nephew out, some aspiring artist. That would do until tax time, when Erla went through their papers and receipts, making notes in her ledger for the accountant.

With the old lady coming to stay, Henry Joe feels justified spending that money. He deserves some pleasure in life, doesn't he?

To ease Erla's homecoming, Henry Joe cleans up the place. He wonders how the washer works. There are so many dials, and little places for pouring in bleach and fabric softener. He wishes he'd watched her run the thing. Instead, he fills the bathtub — with cold water, since he's thrifty in some ways — and shakes in powdered detergent. Then he adds the clothes and swishes them around with a broomstick.

He hangs them outside on the line, then tackles the dishes. He runs them through the shower.

That night, booms of thunder awaken him. Then rain beats against the windows. He groans. The cartoonist had finished the afternoon before. Would the paint have dried, or would there be a big sloppy mess? Would all his winnings have gone to waste? Henry Joe crawls out of bed, gets his flashlight. In his blue boxer shorts he starts across the yard and shines the beam against the wall. He cannot see what is

Sheila Robertson

what, so he goes for his keys. Shining the truck lights on the barn, he sighs in relief. Everything is fine.

"What the devil is that?" Delores, in the back seat behind Henry Joe, has spotted it first. And she claims to have cataracts. "Erla, look!"

They are driving up alongside the farm. Henry Joe has fetched them from the airport.

Erla has been gazing out the window on the passenger side. Now she turns and follows her mother's stare. When she looks at Henry Joe, her jaw is set.

"You'd better have an explanation for this."

Henry Joe feels her anger burning into his cheek. While away, she's had her hair tinted a reddish brown, and he thinks she looks 10 years younger with the grey covered. He considers telling her this. But her eyes are hard little balls and Henry Joe changes his mind.

At the lane, he stops for the mail and stands shuffling envelopes. There is a late birthday card from his dentist, the phone bill and a Co-op flyer. Gravely, he passes these to Erla as he slides back behind the wheel.

Popeye and Olive Oil and the whole cast are looming into view now, and Delores's hand has flown to her mouth. Erla's jowls are twitching and her cheeks are crimson.

Good thing the old lady's along, Henry Joe thinks. It's saved him a blasting.

Not a word is spoken about it over supper, though Erla is still puffed up with fury. She ignores Henry Joe. But at bedtime she snaps, "Where did you get the money?"

The old lady is already snoring loudly in the next room, and Henry Joe is sitting up in bed reading an implement dealer's brochure. There's a seed drill on special that interests him.

"For my birthday."

Erla snorts. "For your birthday! What, you rob a bank?" She's struggling with her pajamas, and the top is stuck over her head.

Henry Joe laughs, his usual short spurt. "You'll never guess."

She fixes her top, glaring at him.

"I won it," he says flippantly.

Her expression tells him he is one brick short of a load.

He tosses the brochure onto his night table and shrugs. "Don't believe me, then."

"You," she thrusts a finger at him, "Henry Joe Bugle, are the unluckiest man on earth! You have never won a thing in your life! So don't start telling me you WON the money for this, this stupid idiotic cartoon caper big enough for the whole district to see!" With a huff, she settles her bulk onto the bed and snatches up a magazine.

In the morning she refuses to help with the milking. All day she fusses over the old lady, making her toast and Ovaltine, doling out her pills, rear-

ranging her pillows. Whenever he passes by the window, Henry Joe sees Delores's rheumy old eyes upon him.

Lunch, too, is a solemn affair, with Erla presiding over the table like a monarch at a pauper's feast. Swiping another piece of ham, Henry Joe retreats to the side porch where he generally has a lay-down before his afternoon work. It has turned hot and hazy, and the bees are into the snowball bushes. Their buzzing disturbs his nap, and he gazes over at his brilliantly colored barn. It is truly a professional job, he thinks. He wishes Erla could see it that way too.

The screen door creaks and out comes the old lady, her walker bumping against the door.

Henry Joe closes his eyes.

"Hey, you."

He hears her breathing beside him. In 40 years, he's seen her maybe 15 times, but he feels like she knows him inside out.

"Yes, Del." Slowly, he opens his eyes.

"Erla's some mad, you know."

"I hadn't noticed," he says sarcastically. He doesn't want to be having this dumb conversation with his mother-in-law. Let Erla be mad.

"Well, I just wanted to tell you," and Delores leans over, her wrinkly skin practically falling into his face, "that I think it's the cat's meow." She is grinning.

Henry Joe sits up, his fuzzy eyebrows knitted in confusion.

"She'll get over it."

"I hope so."

"Mark my word." Delores frowns. "I always wished Frank could have taken that trip to Ireland. He always wanted to go, you know."

Henry Joe looks down at his clasped hands. How many times had he heard that? In his family, people didn't go on and on about the dead. It was bad enough when Frank was alive, listening to him dream. What good would it do for the old lady to keep harping about it? So the man had owned a tavern. So he'd wanted to tour the pubs of Ireland. Big deal. Lots of people didn't get what they wanted.

There was lots wrong with Henry Joe's life, too. Like this estrangement from his son. Deep down, he didn't like it one bit. But wasn't it better to stay mad at the boy, keep his distance? Then he wouldn't have to deal with the other stuff. Lending him money, his truck. Putting up with his weird friends. The drugs. The comings and goings at all hours.

"For heaven's sake, Elgin's a grown man," Erla had said once. "What makes you think he would even want to move back here?"

"He could have gone, you know, but his wife never wanted to," Delores continues with a sigh. "And he wouldn't go alone. You, though," she flaps her arm in the direction of the barn, "you've done what you wanted to do."

True to his mother-in-law's word, supper that night is normal. He can't figure women out. Mad as a hornet one minute, normal the next. He goes out to the barn, totally perplexed.

Might as well take in that big calf sale next week. Cleason, his neighbor, asked him to go, but with Erla all steamed up, it hadn't seemed possible to get away overnight.

"Go if you want," she says. "Just don't be frittering away any more money."

Prices are high anyway, and Henry Joe doesn't even bid. If he'd considered things, hadn't been so quick to spend that lottery money.... But no, he refuses to have second thoughts. There'll be other calf sales, other seed drills. He shuffles through the sale ring crowd and goes out to the cafeteria where Cleason is having a hot dog. Henry Joe buys himself a sausage-on-a-bun and sits down.

Cleason's snoring and the traffic outside the motel had kept him awake all night. He's cross and tired and ready to go home.

He watches from the driving shed as a long, white truck backs up to the porch of his house. Two men jump out, open up the rear doors and start unloading furniture. A couch and matching chair, a smaller couch, some coffee tables, lamps, cushions. A tall, wooden thing, maybe a bookcase. Like someone had won the lottery or something!

Home half a minute and facing more debt!

What about the seed drill he needs? Henry Joe carries his duffel bag across the yard to the house and goes in the back.

He smells fresh paint. New carpeting.

Delores is doing a puzzle at the kitchen table. She is bent in concentration.

"What's going on?" Henry Joe asks.

The old lady squints, snaps a piece into place and looks up.

Henry Joe hears Erla in the living room, giving directions. As she steps into view, he sees the triumph in her eyes.

"You've got me for good, now," Delores says.

Henry Joe's stomach lurches. He stares at her.

"It isn't every mother gets to see her children enjoy their inheritance." Delores picks up another puzzle piece, turns it around, then fits it into a space. She smacks her lips in satisfaction.

Henry Joe feels the enormity of her words. There'll be no old age home for her. She's here until her dying day.

He drops his bag and goes to the sink for a glass of water. As he guzzles, he glances over at Delores.

She's staring at him. She reminds him of an old hoot owl with thick glasses. "There's just one more thing, Henry Joe."

He swallows. "What's that?" He's hot and grouchy and there are chores to do.

"I want to see my grandson. I want you to fetch that boy home."

He is speechless. Who does she think she is, making such demands? If he wants to bring his son home, he'll do it of his own accord.

"We phoned him." Erla steps into the kitchen. "He's agreed to fly up." She crosses her arms over her chest. "On one condition." She throws Henry Joe a silent warning, and he feels his insides pinching.

He gazes into Delores's knowing eyes. He would have to do the asking, mend the rift.

The two women keep watching him.

He sets down his glass and walks to the window. Pulling the curtains aside, he looks out, at his psychedelic barn, and the nose of a psychedelic bus.

Slowly, it hits him. Like father, like son.

His shoulders fall and he smiles, hoping his heart will catch up. ■

A modest proposal

I propose seeking a government grant to develop a recipe book with dishes calculated to please the most fastidious palate — ground squirrel scampi, gopher cacciatore, rack of Richardson's and rodent stroganoff.

Humor by Joe Campbell

When I was growing up on the Prairies, we seemed to be overrun with gophers. They gorged on grasses, gobbled up grain, and filled the fields with holes that threatened to break the legs of unwary livestock. Those cute little rodents were such a nuisance the government put a price on their heads. Well, actually it was on their tails. For every gopher you killed, you qualified for a bounty, but you had to deliver the tail to collect. This was a boon to penniless urchins like me, who delivered tails by the bushel.

I don't know what happened to the tails. Rumor had it that government cooks removed the hair, fried the tails with butter and onions and fed them to inmates of public institutions. I don't put much stock in the rumor. Governments usually aren't that imaginative.

Come to think of it, I don't know what gophers did with the tails, either. They're too short to swish flies with, too light for a rudder and too weak to swing by. Frankly, they were an embarrassment, a vestigial organ like the appendix. The little critters were probably better off without them.

We used to catch them alive, prune them on the spot and set them free to breed. We knew enough biology to realize that acquired characteristics are not inherited and the offspring would arrive complete with tails to ensure our future income. Gophers are very prolific. A mother gopher can bear as many as 12 pups each year. We didn't want to interfere with that potential cash flow. This meant we couldn't poison, drown, shoot or club them. We had to lasso them.

We used a small diameter cord with a noose at one end and us at the other. We would lay the noose, hidden under dirt and leaves, round the perimeter of one of the holes leading to a gopher's underground quarters. When the occupant poked its head out to see what the weather was like, we snared it.

File photo

We hadn't yet learned that gopher is the common name for Richardson's ground squirrel. It's a good thing, too, because we wouldn't have known how to get Richard's permission for what we were doing with his property. I still don't know. More importantly, I don't know how Richardson came into possession of all those gophers and their descendents. If I had been Richardson, I would have posted no hunting signs and harvested the tails myself. We met quite a few people while we were on gopher stakeouts, but never Richardson. I guess he was an absentee landlord.

When I recall those halcyon days, my entrepreneurial juices start flowing. Today, domesticating and marketing indigenous species for food is big business. Take elk and bison: because they're native to the Prairies, they're much more economical to raise than immigrant species like cattle, swine or sheep. No animal is more indigenous to the Prairies than the gopher. If the tail suggests a tasty hors d'oeuvre, think what the rest of them might offer as a main course. Gophers are popular with weasels, coyotes, falcons and hawks. I don't see why those predators should get all the choice cuts.

Gopher colonies can be economically domesticated on less than an acre of prairie. The main requirements are above- and below-ground fencing strong and dense enough to keep the gophers in and their land-based predators out, a cover of coarse netting that admits sunshine and rain but excludes airborne predators, and rations of surplus grain to fatten the stock for market. Specialized abattoirs would follow.

For cultural and other invalid reasons, consumers might resist gopher meat. People who happily devour snails, squid, lobster and other creepy crawly things turn up their noses when you offer gopher. Some who consider frog legs a delicacy consider gopher legs a disaster. I've seen it time and

again and I don't understand it. North Americans seem far more adventurous with seafood than landfood.

Clearly, we need a proper public relations program. I propose seeking a government grant to develop a recipe book with dishes calculated to please the most fastidious palate; things like ground squirrel scampi, gopher cacciatore, rack of Richardson's and rodent stroganoff.

Here's an example of classic gopher cuisine.

Curried Gopher

2 lb cubed lean gopher
2 tsp curry powder
1/4 cup flour
2 T. shortening
1 can (10 oz) condensed onion soup
1/2 soup can water
1 cup sliced celery
1 tart red apple, cubed
1/4 cup seedless raisins
hot cooked rice
chutney
shredded coconut
chopped peanuts

Combine flour and curry powder and roll gopher in it. Brown meat in shortening in frying pan and blend in any remaining flour. Add soup, water, celery, apple and raisins. Cook covered on low heat one hour, or until gopher is tender. Serve over hot rice (about 4 cups cooked.) Garnish with remaining ingredients. Serves 6 to 8.

Suggested wines: dandelion is the first choice, providing the plants have matured in proximity to gopher colonies. Otherwise, any wine fermented from indigenous sources will complement this tasty dish.

Gophers are but one of many indigenous species we might profitably raise for food. Others highly recommended are porcupines, because they provide their own toothpicks; cougars, because if we don't eat them they might eat us; and groundhogs, because few dishes are more appealing than a roast suckling groundhog with a crabapple in its mouth. ■

The gopher incident

Memory by Daphne Murray

The 1930s were bad times, but I remember good times growing up in a little Saskatchewan town. My father had the lumber and coal yard and looked after the trains when they stopped. We had a three-room house: a large room and kitchen combined, where my parents slept; and a bedroom where I and my two older sisters slept in one bed. The third room, at the front of the house, was Dad's office.

Every month we received relief packages from the government, and one of the items we received was cheese, packaged in a wooden box. I was making a train out of the boxes, so waited excitedly for each month's box of cheese so I could add to my train.

During the summer months, we kids would take rides on the jiggers. We'd all sit on the jigger's floor and the older boys would pump the handle and take us for a ride down the tracks. This was great fun. The railway workers didn't think so, though, when they had to walk farther down the tracks to retrieve their jiggers.

The summer meant going barefoot and gopher hunting. The town had acquired a collie dog and when we went looking for gophers, the dog would come along. When we threw water down the gopher holes, the dog would catch them as they tried to climb out.

When I think of those times, one incident always comes to mind. My sister and I were out looking for gophers one day, because we could get three cents a tail for them. This particular day we were out with the gopher trap Dad had got for us, and when we arrived home with our catch, my sister dared me to throw one of the dead gophers into the room where my mother was holding the Ladies Aid Meeting.

I was always good for a dare so, holding the gopher behind my back, I walked into the room and threw it, with all the might of a six-year-old, amongst the assembly. You never saw such a sight as those women scrambling around the room and screaming, and there was my mother so calm, picking up the gopher and disposing of it.

Since Mother didn't say anything, I felt smug, but that didn't last long. When I sat down for supper that night, it was on a very sore bottom. ■

(Daphne Murray, who grew up in Tyner, Sask., writes from Vancouver.)

By Calvin Daniels

Mezzo ascendant

Grant Kernan, A.K. Photos, courtesy Saskatoon Opera Assoc.

Angela Leson, left, in a "pants part" as as Cherubino in The Marriage of Figaro. Laurien Gibson is Barbarina .

In a world of country crooners and alternative rock, relatively few vocalists aspire to the rigorous demands of opera.

Meet Angela Leson, a 22-year-old mezzo-soprano whose goal is to attend university in the United States to get her master's degree. Recently, she auditioned at both the University of Kentucky in Lexington and Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

While these institutions may not be household names in Canada, they are highly regarded in the realm of operatic music.

"They have very reputable teachers," she Leson said, adding the art form is well supported in both college towns. "People are a little more exposed to [opera] down there than we are."

Since even small U.S. communities have campuses with music departments, there are more prospects for her there than in Canada. While she has decided to continue studying and teaching in Saskatoon this year, she plans to head south in 2001.

Leson is looking to the U.S. after having achieving a high level of success in her home province. She has honed her vocal craft to the point that in 1999 she was considered the best in the province.

Pinpointing exactly why she chose opera is difficult, said the singer, who grew up in Canora, Sask. She had taken piano for a number of years when she decided to add voice training as well.

"It's something I've always appreciated," she said. So, at 12, she began taking trips to Regina twice a week to study voice with Diana Woolrich and piano with Janice Deniko.

Leson said there is no doubt her parents, Glen and Nancy Leson, played a key role in her development as a singer. Jokingly, she advises, "Choose your parents wisely."

In fact, Leson credits her father with encouraging her to take voice lessons. "Dad kind of told me I was taking voice lessons at 12," she said. "I was interested, but reluctant. The thought of getting up in front of people to sing — it's a hard thing to overcome, the nervousness."

Experience has taught her that nervousness is part of the process of performance. In fact, her voice teacher told her once, "The day you don't get nervous is the day you don't care."

The term mezzo-soprano is a designation of vocal range. Compared with soprano "there's a different color to the voice, a bit of a darker color," Leson said. "There's a bit of a bigger sound, I think."

Opera singers are often categorized by their fach, the German word for "drawer," she added. "The fach contains all the roles you can sing in opera," she said. In her case, that means roles for mezzo-soprano.

Leson still plays piano, but it is not her specialty. When she looked at herself as a pianist, it didn't fit. "You've got to practise eight hours a day and only two percent make it to the concert stage."

For Leson, voice came more naturally. "It's unbelievable. I enjoy it. There's really nothing I'd rather be doing."

In many ways, singing opens Leson up to herself. "It helps me understand myself better," she said. "It's like a lonely journey at times. I just get to see myself in different ways. It's how you deal with different situations. You spend a lot of time by yourself. You get to think a lot. It's not a nine-to-five job."

At times, Leson said, she has to reaffirm in her mind why she is walking such a path. But she is helped by the words of her current voice teacher, Lisa Hornung.

"She has a little mantra she tells me: 'I am a good singer, I am well prepared, and the audience is going to love me.'"

Given Leson's love of singing, it was a given that she would take music at university. She recently completed a Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Saskatchewan.

Leson continues to train with Hornung, who lives in North Battleford. Hornung herself studied at Southern Illinois University.

"It's a whole new technique," Leson said of her teacher's approach to voice training.

She was accustomed to using breathing techniques, but Hornung's direction involves the entire body. "It's something I've never been exposed to before," Leson said. "The whole technique is designed to get the biggest sound you can."

Leson gained significant recognition of her talent at the Saskatchewan Music Festival held in Saskatoon in June 1999. There she won a number of voice awards including the Goodfellow Memorial Operatic Scholarship and the Goodfellow Memorial Senior Vocal Concert Group Scholarship. As a result of these honors, Leson performed at the Grand Awards Gala, where she captured two more awards. She also received the most prestigious award at the gala, the Sister Boyle Award for the most outstanding competitor.

"It was a surprise. I had just started studying with my new teacher [Hornung] for about a month and a half," she said. "It was a way to test the knowledge I had learned from her."

Leson, who advanced through the Yorkton Music Festival, has been involved with festivals for years. "When you grow up in the festival, you meet a lot of people. It's almost a little community," she said, adding that to do so well in front of friends "was really wonderful."

While the win was gratifying, Leson was reluctant to place too much importance on it. "I downplay things a little bit—nothing is ever really 'it,'" she said. "In a sense, it does validate what I am doing, it just feels like there's a lot more. It's a positive step, of course, but it's like a battle and there's a whole war yet."

The performance in Saskatoon helped boost her confidence in part because not all the adjudicators were voice experts. "The best pair of ears is the untrained pair," she said. "The best thing you can hear is when someone comes up and says 'You have a nice voice.'"

Leson hopes people hear a joyous singer when she performs. "I have to be happy. A lot of people can have angst and let that be their focus, but I have to be pretty calm and relaxed."

With the festival behind her, Leson then won the Most Promising Young Artist competition, sponsored by the Registered Music Teachers of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This enabled her to tour Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

She began teaching last fall, and finds that rewarding as well. "When you teach, you learn more about singing, too," she said.

Music is definitely in her future, Leson emphasized. "Opera is actually coming into the forefront a bit more than it used to be, especially in the West," she said, pointing to the success of the Edmonton Opera.

"I will be able to make a living out of it. I'll sort of shoot for the stars and see what happens."

She noted it's difficult to predict where her voice may take her, particularly since, at 22, it has not yet fully matured. "That doesn't really happen until 30, so there's a lot of time yet."

Leson admits to having a favorite composer. "I enjoy Mozart thoroughly," she said. "It fits well in the voice. But now I'm getting to explore all types of different roles."

Among them are roles originally written for castrato singers, now known as "pants parts," she said.

Castrato is an artificially created high male voice range which has not existed for more than 50 years. Among the operas Leson performed in during her university years was Hansel and Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck — the original Humperdinck, not the pop singer.

"I played Hansel. That was a lot of fun," she said.

In Saskatoon this spring she performed another "pants part," the role of Cherubino in the Marriage of Figaro, with the Saskatoon Opera Association. The role came without the pressure of auditions.

"The [opera] community is kind of small here. They just asked me to sing," she said.

Bruce Garman, one of the directors of the production, said Leson impressed everyone with the distinctive color of her voice as well as her Italian pronunciation, which she picked up merely by listening to recordings.

"She was very well-prepared," he said.

As long as she sings, she'll be happy, Leson said. "I just want to learn so much more. I just want to be able to sing like crazy."

This summer, she'll be taking a five-week opera workshop in Edmonton, featuring resource people from the Metropolitan Opera. "That will be a good learning experience," she said.

Someday she too may appear on the main stages of world opera houses, but Leson won't allow herself to dream openly about such things.

Instead, she muses, "I've always thought if you have a gift, a dream, and a work ethic. . . ." She ends the train of thought with a hopeful smile. ■

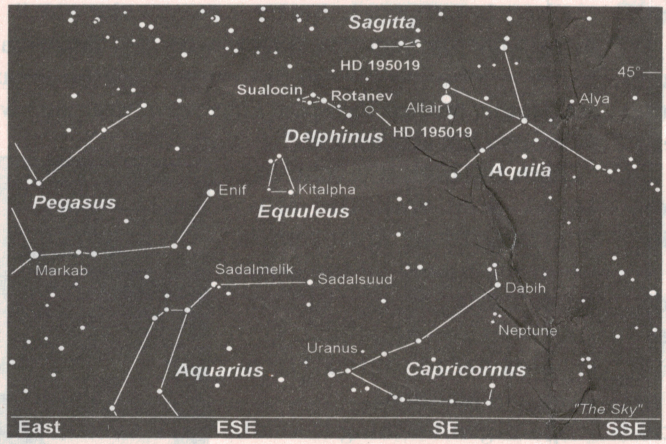
Sheila Robertson

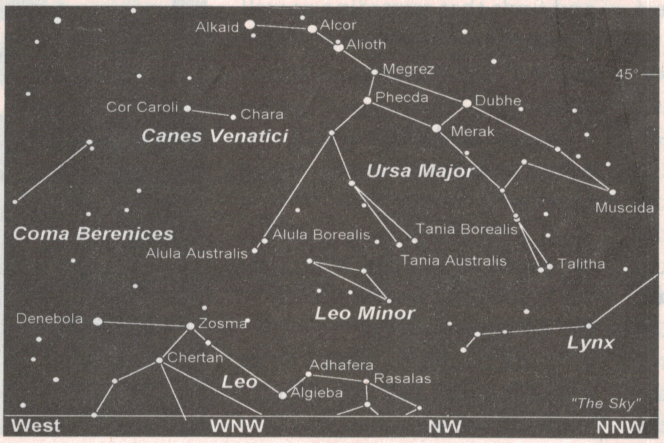
Leson says a recent festival win was gratifying but "it's like a battle and there's a whole war yet."

PRAIRIE NIGHTS

INVISIBLE OBJECTS

By Stan Shadick





Top: Delphinus above SE horizon, two hours after sunset in July. Bottom: Ursa Major above NW horizon, two hours after sunset in July.

An old Greek tale tells how Arion, a 7th century BC musician, was attacked by sailors when returning on a ship from a concert tour of Sicily. When the sailors drew their swords and surrounded Arion, his response was to sing, which attracted a school of dolphins. He then jumped overboard and was carried to safety on their backs.

Apollo, god of music, honored the dolphins by placing the constellation of Delphinus, the Dolphin, in the sky. To modern skywatchers, it more closely resembles a small kite complete with a tail of stars.

Dolphin's two brightest stars were given the special names Sualocin and Rotanev by Italian astronomer Giuseppe Piazzi in 1814. These names spelled backwards honored Piazzi's assistant, Nicolaus Venator.

Sualocin is a main-sequence star that generates the energy needed for starlight within its central fusion reactor. This reactor consumes its hydrogen fuel at a much greater rate than does our Sun, allowing Sualocin to shine with the radiation equivalent to 69 Suns.

Rotanev is a subgiant star that has depleted its core fuel supply and is now consuming the remaining hydrogen surrounding its core. A companion star revolves around Rotanev every 27 years at an orbital separation similar to the distance between Uranus and the Sun.

Astronomers recently announced that they had observed an unusual motion in another of the Dolphin's stars—HD 195019. They have interpreted the effect as due to the gravitational influence of an invisible Jupiter-class planet revolving around the star every 18 days.

The short orbital period implies that this massive planet lies very close to the star at a separation distance of only 21 million kilometres, less than one-third of Mercury's distance from the Sun. Such a closeness is puzzling because current theory suggests that massive planets should form at much greater distances. Perhaps this planet has migrated closer to its central star since it was created.

Another puzzle lies much farther away in Delphinus constellation. Using giant telescopes, astronomers have detected three separate images of a distant quasar known by its catalogue number MG2016+112. They believe the quasar images are created by a gravitational lens where a cluster of galaxies with a mass equal to 10,000 Milky Ways resides between our galaxy and the quasar. The gravity of the cluster could bend the light from the quasar and redirect some light toward Earth along three separate paths.

The problem with this theory is that no galaxy cluster has been seen in the direction of the quasar. Perhaps this cluster contains few normal stars and is made up primarily of invisible material.

Astronomers have long suspected that some kind of dark matter constitutes most of the universe. Additional study is needed to determine if this matter is real or is a figment of our imagination.

Skywatchers in B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan will have the opportunity of watching the moon make part of the sun invisible during a partial solar eclipse July 30. It begins near sunset at about 8:20 pm CST / MDT or 7:30 pm PDT.

To protect your eyes from the sun's remaining harmful rays, use proper eclipse viewing glasses that are sold in some stores or over the internet. Never use sunglasses. Blindness can occur if unsafe viewing techniques are followed. ■

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phone: 1-800-667-6978 or (306) 665-3543
fax: (306) 934-2401 (no art by fax, please)
KiDSPiN co-ordinator: Michelle Houlden

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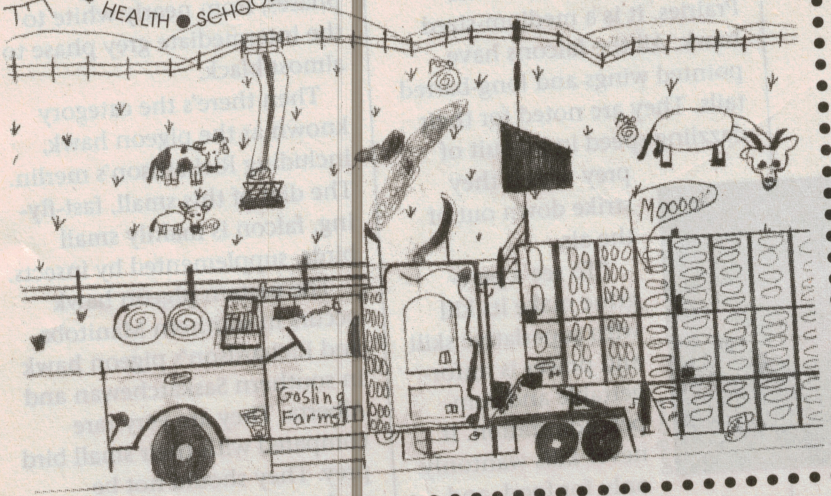
1-800-668-6868

Brandon Gosling, 11
Ogema, Sask.



Summer thirst busters

Drink makers are competing to quench your summer thirst – and tempt your taste buds. To find out which drinks are the best of the bunch, we asked a fourth-grade class to taste four of the newest drinks on the shelves.

Fierce Gatorade

Eight out of 27 taste-testers thought the drink was a little too watery or needed more sugar. But Nicki Christensen, 9, said, "It's awesome for sports games."

Mistic Strawberry

You'll either love or hate the taste of this new fruit drink with a creamy, smoothie-like texture. But everybody agreed that the curved shape of the plastic bottle is cool. Matt Jimmerson, 10, said the drink is "too sweet and it's gross!" But Corey Eiferle, 9, loved it because it "tastes like fresh strawberries and cream." Emma Maylen, 9, said she'd take it to lunch or to camp.

Sobe is so good

Lizards rule on the decorated glass bottles with Sobe's lively lizard logo. (The newest flavor, Tsunami, hitting stores now, features the lizard on a surfboard.) Sobe markets its drinks as health drinks. Tracey Mitchell, 11, said, "It's a little better than orange juice." Our testers also tried Power Sobe, a berry-flavored drink.

Picture-perfect soda pop

Jones Soda Company's drinks come in collectible glass bottles, and fun and fizzy flavors like Green Apple Soda, Bubblegum and Strawberry Lime Soda. The class loved the bright colors, the taste and the bottles, which feature black and white photos on the labels. Green Apple was the tasters' favorite flavor. — *KRT*

I want to know!

Science and crafts

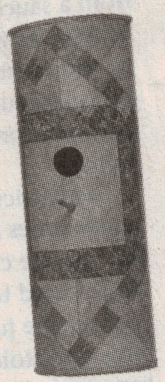
Send your questions to I want to know! c/o KiDSPiN, Box 2500, Saskatoon, Sask. S7K 2C4 or e-mail us at kidspin@producer.com.

Make a birdhouse

You'll need:

▲ 10-centimetre diameter plastic PVC pipe, cut 30 cm long ▲ Two 30-cm-square linoleum peel-and-stick tiles ▲ Hair dryer ▲ Black electrical tape ▲ Hot glue gun (for adult use only) ▲ 1 1/2-inch drill bit ▲ One 5-cm-long dowel (for the perch) ▲ Twine or wire

Do this:



1. Peel the backing from your tile. Wrap it around the pipe. Warm the tile with a hair dryer for a few minutes to help it stick. (The tile will leave a gap on the back side of the pipe. You can patch it with extra tile or place that side against a tree, wall or fence.) Next, wrap the pipe with electrical tape in three spots to hold the tile in place until it sticks. Leave the tape in place for about half an hour.

2. Lay the end of the pipe vertically on the second tile (don't peel the backing off this one). Trace around the pipe with a pencil. Then cut out the two circles with scissors. These will be the top and bottom of the house. Glue the circles on top and bottom with the glue gun.

3. Have an adult drill a 4 cm-inch hole through the side, about 20 cm up. Below the hole, drill another small hole, 1 cm in diameter, for the perch. Glue the perch on with the glue gun and let set.

Be creative — make the basic birdhouse with birch bark around the tube. Or use artificial wood tile cut into 3- by 6-cm strips to make a shingled house. To hang the birdhouse, have an adult screw in an eyebolt or hook at the top. Thread twine or wire through the hole. — *KRT*

PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

THE FOX & THE ICE CREAM

Column No. 1,583
by Doug Gilroy

My picture shows a red fox getting ready to pounce on a mouse in the grass. It reminds me of the experience of a reader in London, Ont.

"A few years ago we were given a baby fox which should really never have been taken from his mother," she writes. "However, the damage was done and someone stole it so we asked if we could have it and were given it to see if we could raise it.

"We fed it milk from a doll's bottle for a few days, then it learned to drink from a saucer. That fox, 'Reddy,' as we called him, grew to be a most lovable pet, although our old hound dog did not appreciate having him around.

"He particularly loved ice cream cones and if he was in my favorite chair he would nip me if I tried to put him out. One day he jumped up on the table and stole a bunch of bananas, so I would chase him until he finally dropped them.

"He ate, or chewed, the toe out of my husband's socks. He had the run of the yard and would come when we called him for dinner.

"When he became a year old he decided he didn't belong here, I guess, and wished to return to the woods. At least I presume he heard the call of the wild, for we never saw him again. We shall never forget Reddy."

Two or three columns ago I talked about hawks, according to *Hawks of Western Canada* by B.W. Cartwright.

Doug Gilroy

Red fox spots a mouse in the grass.

Now we deal with falcons, including the peregrine. "Commonly called duck hawk, it is uncommon to rare on the Prairies. It is a medium-sized hawk. All the falcons have pointed wings and long-barred tails. They are noted for their dazzling speed in pursuit of prey which they strike down out of the air.

"To see a peregrine make its kill with superlative skill and power is unforgettable and compels admiration. It never kills wantonly, only for food, and will not hesitate to tackle duck, goose, or even great blue heron. We can well afford to preserve the most highly specialized and superlatively well developed flying organism on our planet today."

The prairie falcon is a close relative of the peregrine. In Canada, writes Cartwright, "it is rare except perhaps in southern B.C. and southwestern Alberta. Rare in both south Sask. and Manitoba.

"It is a pale wet sand color, distinguishable in flight from other falcons by the dark band on the under side of the wing. As well as being able to kill fast-flying ducks, it is noteworthy in its pursuit of small mammals like ground squirrels, marmots and jack rabbits. In striking at these, it descends like a bullet at a long low angle and if the animal is missed it may ricochet along the ground for some distance, striking again and again, a puff of dust marking each unsuccessful effort."

The gyrfalcon, the largest falcon, lives in the far north and appears only rarely during the winter on the southern plains. It has three color phases, from nearly white to the intermediate grey phase to almost black.

Then there's the category known as the pigeon hawk, including Richardson's merlin. The diet of this small, fast-flying, falcon is mainly small birds, supplemented by insects.

The eastern pigeon hawk occurs in southern Manitoba and Richardson's pigeon hawk in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta. They are very rare compared with their small bird prey. They should not be molested except when they're raiding chicken runs, as occasionally happens.

Finally there's the sparrow hawk, which is common on the Prairies. It perches on telephone wires and on fenceposts. A small, highly colored hawk, it feeds chiefly on insects, rarely attacking small birds. One of the most highly beneficial of the hawk tribe, it should be protected at all times. ■

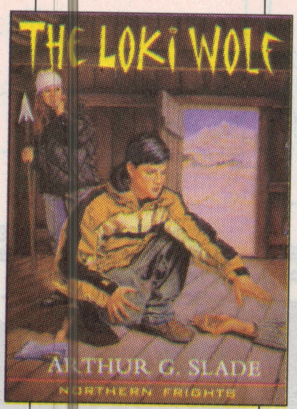
BOOKS

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

By Verne Clemence

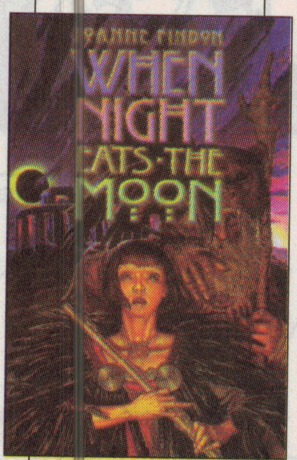
Summer holidays mean the search is on for good young adult books. Here are three that are sure to capture youthful imaginations.

The Loki Wolf is the third in the Northern Frights series by Saskatoon writer Arthur Slade. Those who read the first two books will recognize some of the characters in this new yarn. It's another action-packed trip into the mysteries of the Norse mythology that fascinates the author.



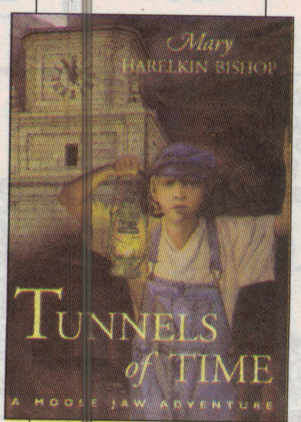
Michael, one of the protagonists in the second in the series, The Haunting of Drang Island, is involved again. This time he and his twin sister Sarah accompany their cousin Angie when their grandfather treats all three to a Christmas trip to his birthplace in Iceland.

The deep snow and 24-hour nights are a culture shock for the American teens. But that's nothing compared to the shock of seeing their Grandfather's scary stories coming true before their eyes.



On their uncle's remote farm they see strange faces at the windows and hear strange sounds in the ink-black night. Sheep die by an unknown hand and traps baited with their organs greet the visitors on their first day.

Their grandfather suddenly gets sick. There's something odd about the way their uncle is acting. Their search for some straight answers leads them into a terror-filled fight for their lives.



Their foe is a creature straight out of an ancient Icelandic myth. The Loki wolf is a savage half man, half animal apparition bent on settling an old score with the Asmundsons, Angie's mother's family. What makes the wolf such a formidable foe is that it can change in an instant into any form it desires.

This is an Orca Publishers book selling for $8.95.

There are scary figures in *Tunnels of Time*, too, but they're all human. This is a time travel adventure by another Saskatoon author, Mary Harelkin Bishop. The setting is Moose Jaw in the early 1920s. The action takes place one level below ground in a series of tunnels used by bootleggers and gangsters of that time.

Andrea Talbot, 13, is in the city to be a junior bridesmaid at her cousin's wedding. She's unhappy, wanting instead to be off on a mountain bike tour. Little does she know that what's really in store is something far more exciting.

In fact, after she accidentally falls into a mirror and finds herself in a life and death struggle between the Moose Jaw police and a gang of crooks, she's soon longing to be at the boring wedding rehearsal.

But she can't find her way back. A mysterious youth mistakes Andrea for a boy and presses her into service as a runner in the tunnels. Runners guide the assorted lowlifes through a tangle of tunnels in a dark world where might is right and child guides are supposed to be seen and not heard.

An especially nasty piece of work known as Big Al is Andrea's nemesis, not because he doesn't like her, but because he does. The brutal scar-faced gangster, who is badly wanted by the law, drags Andrea into his web of evil. She fears for her life if she disobeys him, but finally she fights back.

Coteau is the publisher; the price is $7.95.

For more time travel action, *When Night Eats the Moon* offers a chilling journey back to the days of Stonehenge and the Iron Age in ancient Britain.

Written by JoAnne Findon of Coquitlam, B.C., this is the story of how 13-year-old Holly is summoned to go back to 700 BC on an urgent mission.

Holly is transported from a secret room in a barn on the farm of her aunt and uncle in southern England. She's already deeply troubled because she fears her parents have left her there while they start divorce proceedings back in Vancouver. Every time she plays her flute to escape her troubles, she gets dragged back for another short visit with the Druids.

Confused and frightened, she finally learns that she is supposed to come to the rescue of a small band of peaceful Druids who are about to be wiped out by fierce Celtic warriors.

Red Deer Press is the publisher; the price is $9.95. ■

PEANUTS Classics

5-2-00
MY GRANDFATHER HAS A BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK
DOES HE MIND GETTING OLD?
NO, HE SAYS IT DOESN'T BOTHER HIM... IN FACT, HE SAYS HE FEELS GREAT...
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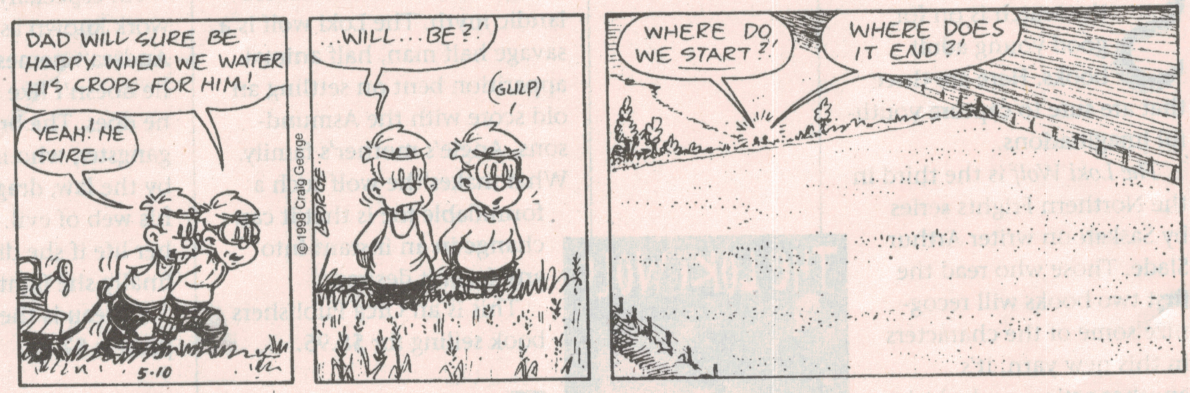
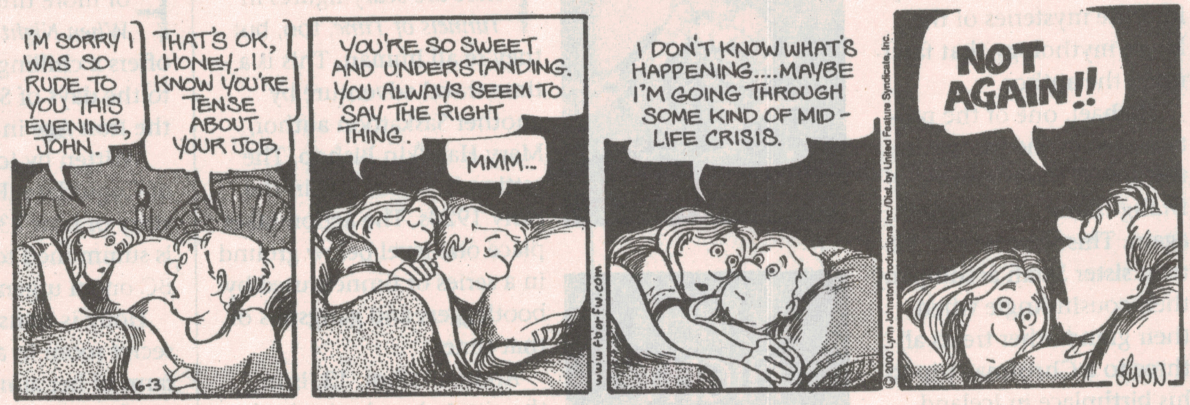
HE SAYS THAT ONCE YOU'RE OVER THE HILL, YOU BEGIN TO PICK UP SPEED!
SCHULZ

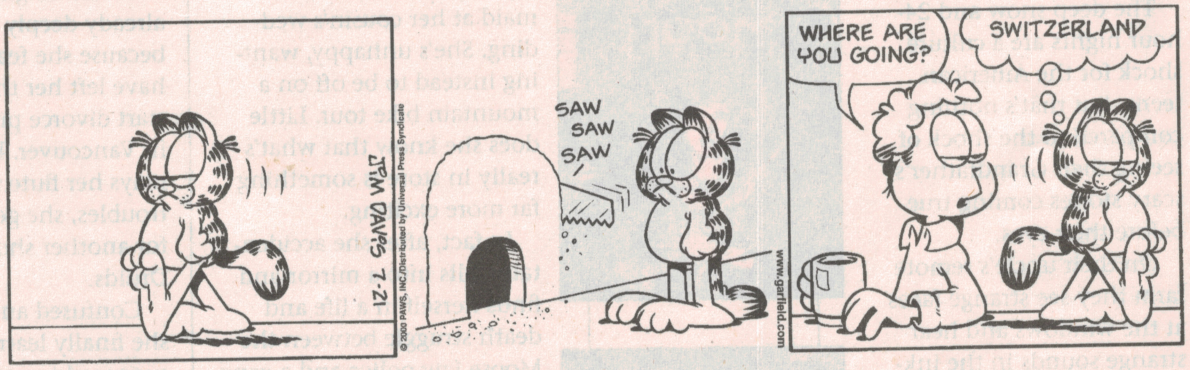
RURAL ROOTZ



For BETTER or for WORSE


I'M SORRY I WAS SO RUDE TO YOU THIS EVENING, JOHN.
THAT'S OK, HONEY. I KNOW YOU'RE TENSE ABOUT YOUR JOB.
6-3
YOU'RE SO SWEET AND UNDERSTANDING. YOU ALWAYS SEEM TO SAY THE RIGHT THING.
MMM...
www.FBorF.com
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING....MAYBE I'M GOING THROUGH SOME KIND OF MID-LIFE CRISIS.
© 2000 Lynn Johnston Productions Inc./Dist. by United Feature Syndicate, Inc.
NOT AGAIN!!
LYNN

GARFIELD



BETTY

LET'S GO IN HERE
THE SECONDHAND CLOTHING STORE?
SURE, AT THE VERY LEAST WE'LL HAVE A GOOD LAUGH AT STUFF PEOPLE ONCE WORE WITH PRIDE
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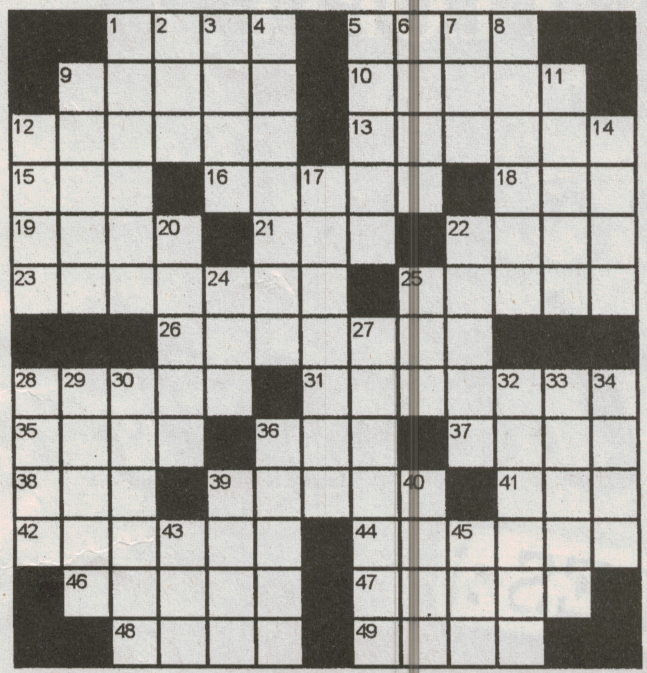
Canadian Criss Cross

by Walter D. Feener

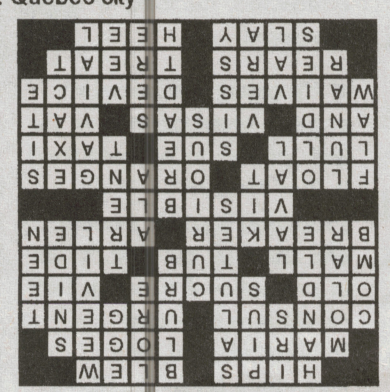


ACROSS

1. Haunches
5. Breathed hard
9. "My ___" (Brooks & Dunn hit)
10. Theatre boxes
12. Foreign officer
13. Requiring prompt attention
15. Living for a long time
16. Bolivia's capital
18. Strive for superiority
19. Shopping center
21. Butter container
22. Ocean motion
23. Water keg, carried in lifeboats
25. "Over the Rainbow" writer
26. That can be seen
28. Parade vehicle
31. Citrus fruit
35. Hush to sleep
36. Bring to trial
37. Hack's car
38. Moreover
39. Passport endorsements
41. Dyeing liquid container
42. Puts off until later
44. Heraldic emblem
46. Brings up
47. Negotiate
48. Kill
49. Achilles' weak spot

DOWN

1. Manipulate
2. Popular April letters
3. Pope name
4. Military greetings
6. Book jacket ad
7. Hen's creation
8. Beetle that feeds on cotton
9. Grinding tooth
11. Slyly malicious
12. Arrange one's hair
14. Adolescent
17. Unnecessarily inquisitive
20. Quebec city
22. English river
24. Set of tools
25. Wing in zoology
27. Distance from side to side
28. Weak point
29. Like the moon
30. Songs of yore
32. Indian crocodile
33. Very accurate
34. Location
36. Coward
39. Actress Miles
40. Withered
43. Actor Kilmer
45. Five dollar bill



MAILBOX

Listings are free but only run once. Please be brief. Issues are prepared three weeks in advance of publication date. Send info to: Mailbox, Western People, Box 2500, Saskatoon S7K 2C4.

Wanted: Jo's Boys by Louisa M. Alcott. Will pay reasonable price. – M. Grunerud, Box 241, Outlook, Sask. S0L 2N0.

Wanted: Jello wheels – cars: 107, 133, 195, 199, 59 and 72. Have plane wheels to trade. – B. DeSpiegelaere, Gen. Del., Bruxelles, Man. R0G 0G0.

Wanted: Music and words to the songs: I'll Remember You, Let Me Call You Sweetheart, Good Night My Love, Angels Among Us. – 749 - 2nd St. E., Prince Albert, Sask. S6V 0E9.

Looking for descendants of Robert Wood and Catherine Harriet Ball, some of whom emigrated to Saskatchewan from Twyning in Gloucestershire, England. Robert Wood remarried Alice Scudder in about 1887 and it was around this time that some of the children from the first marriage emigrated to Canada. Believe there are still descendants living in Saskatoon as they visited my parents Fred and Irene Wood some years ago. Am searching for any news on any descendants. – Pamela Randell, e-mail: johnpam@one.net.au.

Wanted: Patterns for knitting baby booties and baby sweaters. Please send to: Sandra Maendel, Box 299, Austin, Man. R0H 0C0.

Wanted: Stories, poems and illustrations of farm adventures and misadventures. Manitoba Farm Women's Conference 2000 will print a second Harvest of farm women's stories. Submission deadline Aug. 1, 2000. Contact: Joan McCallister, R.R. 1, Box 68, Portage la Prairie, Man. R1N 3A1, 204-857-8092, fax: 204-857-6003, e-mail: imccalli@portage.net.

Wood River Historical Society is continuing to receive family histories from people who were residents of the R.M. of Wood River #74, including the towns of Lafleche, Woodrow and Melaval, from 1940 to the present. Would much appreciate your story if you have not already submitted one. For details, phone Kathi, 306-472-3737.

Venn, Sask. 2000 get-together. Social Saturday evening, July 22; July 23, parade 1 p.m., picnic to follow. For more info, contact: Ross, 306-946-2400.

Wanted: Bunny patterns, all sizes and shapes, anyone willing to share. – Shelly Pals, Box 743, Castor, Alta. T0C 0X0.

Wanted: Where to purchase the books Green Grass of Wyoming by Mary O'Hara or Winds in the West. – V. Murray, Box 159, Blackfoot, Alta. T0B 0L0.

THE TITANIC

Word Find puzzle
by Janice M. Peterson

When all the words in the list have been found, the letters left over will spell the solution.

N	A	I	N	R	O	F	I	L	A	C	T	H	E	S
D	E	S	T	I	N	A	T	I	O	N	U	N	H	S
Y	R	O	T	S	I	H	S	E	G	A	Y	O	V	A
I	N	H	C	D	N	A	B	N	A	E	C	O	B	N
Y	C	S	R	Y	T	E	F	A	S	K	E	R	U	K
T	A	A	A	O	K	M	A	B	S	U	I	S	L	S
I	R	G	S	I	C	I	L	E	C	T	U	G	K	T
C	P	E	H	D	O	T	N	S	I	O	L	R	H	A
K	A	G	S	A	L	I	E	S	M	O	L	E	E	O
R	T	A	T	R	L	R	H	A	S	E	U	B	A	B
O	H	K	E	D	I	A	F	T	S	H	H	E	D	E
Y	I	C	A	N	S	M	T	R	A	G	I	C	I	F
W	A	E	M	U	I	R	E	T	S	A	S	I	D	I
E	H	R	E	O	O	L	O	C	A	T	I	O	N	L
N	P	W	R	F	N	S	R	O	V	I	V	R	U	S

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Band
British
Bulkhead
'Californian'
'Carpathia'
Collision
Crash
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History
Hull
Iceberg
Lifeboats
Location
Lost
Maritime
New York City
Ocean
Radio
Rescue
Safety
Sank
Shock
Steamer
Survivors
Tragic
Voyage
Wreckage

Solution (17 letters):

The unsinkable ship

WESTERN PEOPLE

Photo Contest

THE RULES :)

We're looking for photos that highlight the people of Western Canada.

We'll be awarding a $1,000 top prize, $500 for 2nd place, $250 for 3rd place, $150 for 4th place and $100 for 5th place.

Winners will be announced in October and their photos featured in Western People.

Enter today!

TO ENTER:

- Photos must be recent (taken between Jan. '98 and the present) and must include the photographer's name, telephone number and mailing address as well as information about the subject. No more than three entries per photographer. Entrants' income from photography must not exceed 25% of total income.
- Prints or slides are acceptable in black and white or color formats.
- Photos will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
- By entering this contest, entrants grant permission for their photos to be published in The Western Producer / Western People and used on our website or in promotional material. Staff of Western Producer Publications and their immediate family members are ineligible.

Entries must be received by Aug. 31, 2000